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ABSTRACT

This paper describes deep viewing, a research and instructional method used to reach social understandings of visual texts through the use of communal talk, pictorial, and written means. It provides a means of analysis for any type of visual text. The theoretical origins and premises of deep viewing are examined. Also, the deep viewing methodology as it may be applied in a classroom setting is described. Finally, further applications of the deep viewing method are identified. (Contains 37 references.) (JLB)

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Understanding Visual Information Through Deep Viewing

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Understanding Visual Information Through Deep Viewing

Ann Watts Pailliotet

Although Marshall McLuhan (1964) claimed that the "medium is the message," it is essential to understand content, processes, *and* forms of visual communication. However, systematic analysis of visual media rarely occurs in most educational settings. A methodology is needed that instructs and assists people to better understand the many elements involved in the visual world around them.

This article will describe Deep Viewing, a research and instructional method used to reach social understandings of visual texts through the use of communal talk, pictorial, and written means. Deep Viewing is based upon Roland Barthes' (1957) definition of a text as not limited to written artifacts, but as any cultural or communicative event.

Deep Viewing focuses upon, but is not limited to, the visual characteristics of a text. The method seeks to make explicit the layers of meaning inherent within visual texts, while it examines features of media as seen, heard, and experienced by the audience, thus providing a practical balance between the "medium" and the "message." Deep Viewing provides a means of practical analysis for any type of visual text, allowing the viewer to discover and construct the many messages within the forms of modern media. This method has application to electronic, print, artistic, and situational texts; it may be used to understand film, television, video, computer programs, art work, print representations or advertisements, and recordings or participant field observations of human behavior. Deep Viewing may be used by educators, students, artists, researchers, and general audiences to examine any visual text.

Theoretical Origins and Premises

Deep Viewing is based on the principles and practices of several disciplines, including education, literary criticism, visual literacy, and the social sciences. Its name comes from Margaret Himley's educational process, "Deep Talk," described in her book, *Shared Territory* (1991). Margaret discovered this method at Pat Carini's Prospect School in Vermont, where it was regularly used to describe students' written texts. Deep Viewing extends Himley's methods for analysis of print to include all visual texts. The method respects both the text and the audience. It assumes that deeper meaning is packed into both participants and text; that this meaning is readily available; and that meaning becomes accessible through structured discussion and response.

The Deep Viewing method is compatible with many contemporary theories and practices in education. It assumes that the creation and analysis of visual texts proceeds in a recursive and ongoing manner rather than as a static or sequential event, so it is in keeping with the premises of process writing theorists (Hairston, 1982). It builds on the assumption that meaning is constructed through transactions between audiences and texts, and shares this perspective with contemporary reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1976). Because the Deep Viewing method encourages participants to

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draw from their past experiences, to critically analyze features in the text, and to become aware of their own mental processes of meaning making, this procedure is complementary with the tenets of Whole Language (Goodman, 1982 ; Goodman, Hood, & Goodman, 1991), critical thinking (Marzano, 1991) , and metacognition (Sternberg, 1983). The method accepts that meaning is a constructed through social processes, using many forms of communicational media. Therefore, Deep Viewing uses a collaborative format for analysis (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, & Roy, 1984), and draws from ideas and practices of educators who identify the interactive natures of all modern literacies (Atwell,1985; Calkins, 1983; Collins, 1985; Dyson, 1984; Emery & Sinatra, 1983 ; Hynds, 1990 ; Sinatra, 1986 & 1990).

The development of critical analysis, exploration of personal response, and acceptance of others' points of view made possible by the Deep Viewing process furthers the growing movement toward multicultural awareness in English classrooms. Sinatra (1990) shows how examining popular media allows students to explore cultural biases and experience a wide variety of cultural perspectives, as well as to develop literacies. Because one of Deep Viewing's approaches to visual texts proceeds from a specific examination of cultural codes, the method is a useful way to help students become aware of and appreciate social differences. The method also enables participants to examine how cultural meanings and values are transmitted through mass media and to acknowledge how these meanings reflect relative, situated social constructions rather than absolute truths.

Deep Viewing also utilizes discourse analysis and draws from semiotic practice. Traditionally, discourse analysis centers upon oral or print language, and semiotic theory examines the signs in written language. Deep Viewing extends these notions to include the language of visual images. Barthes (1974) and Fernande St. Martin (1990) set forth codes or categories to order textual meaning. Deep Viewing also uses a coding system, and although one of its categories examines discourse patterns, it also examines visual factors and how the relationships between textual codes create meaning. Because visual media are highly iconic, or representational , Deep Viewing also draws from the practices of symbolic (Jung, 1956 & 1959) and metaphoric analysis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

This process of examining visual and verbal symbols is compatible with many qualitative research methods in the social sciences, particularly those of the Symbolic Interactionists, who believe that through observing human symbols and behaviors, one may ascertain human thoughts and beliefs (Blumer, 1969; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Manis & Meltzer, 1972). The Symbolic Interactionists believe that meaning for individuals is both constructed and reflected through the symbols they use in social situations. Deep Viewing helps participants to become aware of how symbols in visual texts both reflect and shape individual and societal beliefs and behaviors.

Deep Viewing furthers the integration of oral, written, and visual communicational competencies increasingly identified as an important part of modern literacy (Sinatra, 1986 & 1990). It synthesizes the work of visual literacy educators and theorists (Adams & Hamm, 1987; Foster, 1979; Kellner, 1988 ; Masterman, 1980; Newcomb, 1986; Reddy, 1990), semiotic theorists (Barthes, 1957 & 1974 ; Silverman, 1983), visual semiologists (Pettersson, 1992; Robinson, 1992; Saint Martin, 1990), and discourse analysts (Goffman, 1974 & 1981; Himley, 1991) into an easily usable classroom activity. The process assists participants to describe and explore

- meaning, by making explicit the many implicit connotations and connections inherent in both the imagery of the text and in the experiences of the audience. The next section will describe the Deep Viewing method, as it may be applied to visual texts in a classroom setting.

The Deep Viewing Methodology

General Guidelines and Adaptations

Deep Viewing is a three -leveled process. It may best be done in a cooperative learning, Jigsaw II format. Groups are formed to examine one or more categories. Participants are encouraged to write notes and/or draw diagrams as they view and talk. After each level of discussion, groups share their observations with the whole group, thus creating a broad picture of understanding. Extension activities like prewriting, post writing, artistic response, or reading enrichment may be used throughout the levels of inquiry. Responses may also utilize electronic media, like word processing or graphic design, as well as other printed texts, before, during, or after the process.

When analyzing longer texts, participants may determine stopping points for discussion and analysis; in an ongoing event like field work or an observation of a science experiment, participants should concentrate on Level One of the Deep Viewing process, and use Levels Two and Three at the conclusion of the observation. In an observational field text discussion, individuals may share their observations subequently with a whole group; in print, video, film, or artistic texts participants engage in the entire procedure. Deep Viewing may be adapted as needed to create a broad frame for understanding for all visual texts.

There are several points which are useful to remember in a Deep Viewing session:

1. Follow the stated progression to build layers of understanding.
2. It is often useful to designate a facilitator and recorder in each group, especially when learning this technique. The facilitator keeps the group focused on the specific task of each level and makes sure each member is allowed to speak; the recorder takes notes about group comments.
3. For clarity, use "in the text" statements to describe the text. Use "I" statements to express your perceptions, ideas, observations, etc.
4. Teachers may provide prompts as desired. Possible prompts are included at the end of each code in the description of Level Two.

Codes

Form groups according to the following codes:

1. *Action / Sequence* - This group may note events in text through oral discussion, written notes and/or visual devices like flow charts and story boards. They also note relationships of time: when and how long do events take place?

2. *Semes / Forms* - Semes are units of visual meaning that create symbols. This group notes forms in text like colors, objects in a setting, textures, and icons. This group also notes the appearance, types of dress, and features of actors. They note repeated, emphasized and contrasted objects, i.e. objects that are paired with other objects; lightness with darkness in a film , or objects that reoccur throughout the text.

3. *Actors / Discourse* - Although actors are forms or symbols, this is a

separate category for purposes of analysis. This group examines what the characters/actors say. They note words and phrases that may sum up main ideas or themes, repeated language, terms particular to a group, or language that seems out of place.This group also notes what they hear the characters say in the oral / aural text: tone, rate, pitch of voices, and the lyrics of songs in a production.

4. *Proximity / Movement* - This group examines all movement : gestures and movements of characters / actors and other forms. They note: vectorality (where objects or actors move) , relationships (how the forms move in relation to each other), dimensions and relative sizes (does one form dominate by standing in front?)

5. *Culture / Context* - This group notes symbolic and discourse references to cultural knowledge like science, art, educational practice or popular culture . They answer the questions: What is referred to ? What is implied? What is missing? What sorts of hidden messages do these references convey and what cultural perspectives or biases do they create in the mind of the viewer? This group also locates the text in particular historical and social contexts. They look for clues that reveal who made this text? When? Why?

6. *Effects / Process* - In commercial texts, viewers examine "artistic devices:" the use and repetition of techniques, quality of visual and sound effects and musical accompaniments, camera angles and technological enhancements, etc. In less sophisticated productions, viewers examine camera or observer angles, noting what is seen and missing, and posit how perspectives influence understanding. In print texts, they examine the devices used to structure the text, interest the audience, and further the author's purposes. In field work or naturalistic observations, they seek to understand how the observer's perspective and participation affects understanding and outcomes. This group should also focus on the quality of the text: e.g. How do factors like sound, angle of perception , and focus affect meaning?

First Level : Giving Voice and Summarizing

Groups are formed according to the codes. Facilitators, recorders and reporters are selected. In a group setting, students focus on one category or code, using a variety of responses, including talk, writing, and pictures. Teachers may use additional questions that may direct or assist inquiry as desired (e.g. questions about a particular strategy like persuasion, a specific issue like stereotypes, a theme being stressed in readings, or guided inquiry into connections between the current text and others). For very small groups, ask participants to observe more than one code. For individual observations, create a paper with six vertical columns and record relevant observations under each heading as the observation proceeds. Level Two and Three analysis may be done by individuals through written analysis or subsequent talk with others.

Procedure:

Watch the text. Take notes or draw pictures of aspects which you notice, questions that puzzle you, and observations about your topic - observe within your group's assigned focus or code.

During this level there is no cross-talk in groups.

1-1. Go around the table in your groups, each reading aloud your notes about what you have seen and heard in the text. This level is literal. Describe only what you perceive in the text - interpretation will come later.

1-2. Summarize. Remain brief, but remain as true as possible to what *each reader feels or perceives* is the main point of his/her observation.
1-3. Each group reports their findings to the whole group through oral, pictorial, and/ or written means .

Second Level : Making Observations

Teacher models different strategies for response (underlined below). Any of the strategies may be used for any of the codes. Remind students that these strategies may also be used for any text - print, situational, or electronic. Encourage students to draw upon their personal experiences and prior knowledge as they watch, talk, and write. Stress to students that with visual texts, as in literature, there are no single "right answers," but a range of possible interpretations. Often, some of the responses drawn from codes will begin to overlap at this level, as participants begin to discover relations between elements in the texts and their observations about them. This overlap is desirable. Teacher prompts may be created and used throughout Levels Two and Three as needed. Some examples of prompts are provided.

During this level there is no cross-talk in groups until each participant has had a minimum of three uninterrupted turns to speak.

Procedure:

2-1. Go around the table in your groups again, but this time each viewer makes an observation. These observations should be based upon explicit aspects of the text. Note what is present in the text and what is missing. Begin with observations that are readily apparent and move to more inferential levels as you continue.

Action / Sequence - Conclusion: "The action continued longest during X scene--over three minutes . We must then posit that this is important for meaning."

***Teacher prompts** : Is the time sequential or random? Does the action move around different time frames? What have we read that most closely parallels the time sequences in this text? How do we know what time it is? Why do you think the creators used this particular time development? How might the meanings in the text change if the time sequence were different?

Semes / Forms - Observation: "The symbol of X was repeated four times throughout the text." Compare /Contrast : "The image of Y was often paired with the image Z ." Questioning: "What are the connotations of a symbol X?" " How do these two symbols convey possible antithetical meanings?" (e.g. of freedom versus entrapment, goodness versus evil, etc.)

***Teacher prompts:** What symbols or objects were repeated most? Which ones were paired? Why? What feelings, memories, and thoughts do you associate with these symbols? In what other texts have you encountered these symbols? What might they mean to a person from a culture that is different than yours? What did you expect to see that was missing? Why do you think the creators used these particular symbols? Would you use the same ones? Why or why not?

Actors / Discourse - Connecting: "The characters repeat the phrases and words, '.....' When one reads repeated lines in poetry, these lines are often used to emphasize meaning." Identifying communicative purposes: "How do these repeated words further the purposes of the text?" Noting what is missing: "Why doesn't this text contain references or language about A, B, or C? I'd expect them to be there."

***Teacher prompts :** What are the connotations of repeated words and phrases in the text? Why do you think the creators chose these words? What other words could they have used? How might using other words change meaning? What were the tone and mood of the characters and text? How do you know? How are tone and mood conveyed in a print text?

Proximity / Movement - Noting context: "In this scene, Character A stands between character(s) or object(s) B and C. Forming hypotheses: "This relationship may foreshadow coming action; it may indicate how humans are always choosing between alternatives.

*** Teacher Prompts**: What are the relations of objects and what do these relations suggest to you? Why are certain images closer to the viewer while others farther away? What does this suggest about their relative importance? What moves and what doesn't? What do ideas of movement and stillness suggest to you? How is movement or lack of movement used in this text to further plot, characterization, and mood? How are these devices used in literature?

Culture / Context - Observing: Common cultural codes are noted like historic, scientific, artistic, and literary references, or allusions to current events and famous people: "The text contains four references to science." Remembering: "In the news last week they reported that this theory had been disproved." Projecting: "If I were to make this text, I would..." Locating Context: "The characters refer to X historical event, are dressed in a particular style, and use several slang words that lead us to believe this film was made during the late 1950's." Identifying perspectives: Cultural allusions often convey hidden stereotypes and cultural biases. They also often reveal who is the perceived audience from the perspectives of the senders of a message. "The makers of this text seem to present women in submissive roles. How does this reflect the norms in 1950? Is this how people think today?"

*** Teacher Prompts**: How do these references reflect the dominant views of U.S. culture? What assumptions are the senders of this message making about us and the greater society? Do we agree? How do they depict certain groups of people? Are these accurate portrayals? What sorts of words and images reveal stereotypes? How do you feel about these images?

Effects / Process - Noting artistic devices and possible motivations: "Why is this subject viewed from below? Does this connote respect or power? How do the special effects enhance or detract from the text? There are few reverse shots in this sequence. Why does this medium utilize the forms and processes it does?" Noting visual devices : "In the beginning of the text the camera is out of focus or pans in from a wide shot to a narrow shot of the main character. How is this like foreshadowing or development in a novel or poem?" Personal observations and reactions: "How aware am I of how devices are used? What responses do I have to them?"

***Teacher prompts :** How many different angles and effects can you identify? How do these devices capture the viewer's interest? What sorts of devices were used to develop the story? How are they used? What devices are used to create feelings in the viewer like suspense or tension? What devices are used to create fast action? Slow action? How are these devices like those used by authors in print texts? How do they differ?

2-2. Talk at this level continues until readers agree that their observations are complete and they are ready to move into the third level. Groups again stop and share

their observations with the whole group.

Third Level: Inferences, Assumptions, and Evaluations

During this level there is no cross talk until each participant has had two uninterrupted turns, then viewers may talk in any order and question each other. In this level, participants should start with their code focus, and then may progress to a discussion of the other codes.

Procedure:

3 -1. When groups begin making broader inferences about the text's meanings, this level will have begun. Besides broader and more speculative inferences, the participants will now indicate their likes and dislikes about aspects of the text. Viewers may compare or contrast this text with others, draw upon personal experiences, or express collective perceptions in their discussions about the text. Participants should also speculate and pose questions about the text. Discuss these questions and responses in your groups. Be explicit about textual and personal connections . Say "I" when expressing an opinion or observation; say "in the text," when expressing perceptions of what you noted at the literal level.

At this level, the codes often begin to overlap, as participants draw from the findings of other groups. Participants are now free to make connections between their own observations, those of their code group, and those within the classroom. Participants should also speculate and pose questions about the text, relating it to their own experiences, expectations, feelings, and knowledge to what they have seen, heard, and written. Often, at this stage, larger themes and connections are made. All participants should have ample opportunities to listen and respond. There may be breaks in the group conversations. Facilitators should allow these reflective pauses in order for participants to assimilate and formulate ideas. Questions and responses are discussed in the groups until members agree that the topic has been exhausted, and then groups report back to the whole group describing findings they see as particularly interesting or important.

NOTE: The Facilitator should be alert at this level, to keep participants on task.

3 -2. Groups identify questions and general themes. Report findings back to whole group.

Further Applications and Conclusion

In the past year, Deep Viewing has been used by middle school students in California for analyses of films and newscasts, previews of textbooks, and an examination of how commercials use persuasive strategies in order to sell products. In New Mexico, high school students Deep Viewed print advertisements. They discovered that certain images, like colors and objects, are used by both authors of literature and sellers of consumer goods to hold audience interest and further communicational purposes. In New York, a group of university level, textual studies students used the method to watch *The Wizard of Oz* . These sophomores, who often approached textual analysis with tepid responses, were engaged and on task throughout the session. They provided diverse interpretations and novel perspectives of this familiar classic: the existence of Jungian themes, its depiction of the monomyth or hero's quest, its contrast of Christian and pagan imagery, its depictions of cultural stereotypes, and issues of gender the film raises.

Last fall, the Deep Viewing method

was used by teacher candidates to create anecdotal records of students in the classroom and to analyze tapes of their initial classroom experiences. Through an examination of what they said and did, as well as the objects and events in their classrooms, many were astounded to see the cultural assumptions they made and the implicit biases they exhibited within their lessons. The Director of the teacher education program at my University remarked that she had never seen such insight in novices, and attributed this reflective capacity in part to the Deep Viewing training they had received. She is now requiring training in the method for all future candidates. The method has been also been employed by experienced teachers to analyze video tapes of classroom teaching situations, and by faculty at a nearby college as a way to observe student teachers. These participants found value in the method, because it enabled them to examine their own and others' teaching practices in a systematic way. They also noticed aspects of their teaching they had overlooked in the past.

Recently, I have used Deep Viewing to examine films, analyze print and televised commercials, review children's picture books, evaluate computer software, and as a method of observation in my dissertation field work. My husband, a photographer, recently used the method as a way to analyze his pictures, in order to explain them in a written narrative. A science teacher friend of mine now wants to teach the method to his students for observation of experiments.

Deep Viewing also provides a systematic way for researchers and observers to order events and understanding in classrooms and field work. By breaking down the component parts of experience into codes or categories, researchers may gain insight about themselves, the participants and settings which they examine, and the greater implications of their work.

Because Deep Viewing involves reading, writing, speaking, listening, thinking *and* viewing, it offers a way to connect communicational worlds and extend the competencies of our students both in and out of the classroom. Although no instructional strategy is perfect, Deep Viewing has much to recommend it. It is a method which may be used and adapted for a variety of contemporary texts. It shares a common stance with much of existing educational theory and classroom practices. It promotes active participation, critical analysis, and awareness of participants' culturally based assumptions about themselves and others. It is motivational, because it links students' personal experiences to classroom instruction.

With Deep Viewing, teachers may create a powerful connection between classroom material and the students' lives, teaching and reinforcing communicational competencies. I have found that participants enjoy Deep Viewing , tend to stay on task during the process, and often exhibit increased academic and social skills which carry over from the examination of popular texts into traditional study. Deep Viewing is a practical tool that furthers our understanding of both the media and the messages of visual texts.

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